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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000731

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2014
TAGS: PREL PARM KN KS
SUBJECT: INTER-KOREAN MILITARY TALKS CONCLUDE WITHOUT ANY
PROGRESS

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two days of the inter-Korean general officer-level military talks ended on March 3 without any agreement on key agenda items. The ROK side had hoped to map out measures to reduce military tensions on the Peninsula and in the Yellow Sea. However, the DPRK's insistence on discussing the validity of the Northern Limit Line prevented any progress. The two sides also could not reach an agreement on a joint statement at the conclusion of the talks, and the ROK failed to secure a commitment on scheduling a N-S Defense Ministerial. While somewhat disappointed at the lack of progress at the talks, ROK officials told us that they had low expectations and inadequate preparations for the talks. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) General officers from the two Koreas met on March 2-3 at Panmunjom truce village in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The two-day gathering was the second of its kind since June 2004 and the third since the inter-Korean summit in 2000. According to MND officials, the ROK's agenda for the meeting included measures to prevent clashes in the West Sea, establishing a joint fishing area, reaching agreement on military assistance, and introducing military confidence building measures. The ROK also had hoped to schedule the next round of the general officer-level talks and a second round of the N-S Defense Ministerial.

¶3. (C) Confirming press reports, MND and UNCMAC interlocutors told us that the talks failed to make any progress on the main agenda items, with both sides holding ground on their issues of importance. Most notably, the ROK's effort to discuss tension-reducing measures in the West Sea bogged down as the North took a hard-line stance on redrawing the Northern Limit Line (NLL). The DPRK delegation insisted that the NLL issue had to be addressed before the talks could cover other issues. The ROK tried to postpone the NLL issue to a future meeting, but the North held firm to its position. A Ministry of Unification (MOU) official told us that the DPRK's refusal to agree on any other issue without agreement on a maritime border in the West Sea was something new and would require more internal deliberation before the next round. Given the North's unhelpful stance, MOU was pessimistic whether the two sides could reach agreement on the maritime border issue at the next round.

¶4. (C) The North Korean delegation's insistence on the NLL issue prevented the ROK delegation from pursuing fully some

of the other main agenda topics. The two sides were unable to set a date for a future round of general officer talks nor were they able to propose a date for a second N-S Defense Ministerial Meeting. MND and MOU official do not anticipate any breakthrough on scheduling the Defense Ministerial in the near future. The two sides also failed to agree on a joint statement. According to UNCMAC, the DPRK delegation tried to hold an impromptu press conference with the ROK press after the talks, but the ROK press apparently did not cooperate. As expected, the North also used the talks as a venue to lambaste the South for its participation in "war exercises" with the USFK, citing it as a preparation to invade the North. Afterwards, the two sides blamed each other for the lack of progress.

¶5. (C) A senior ROK JCS member of the ROK delegation told us that he had not expected much to come out of the talks. Although Minister of Unification Lee Jong-seok had instructed the ROK delegation to be "lenient and generous," the DPRK delegation's position on the NLL issue made it impossible to make progress on any of the key issues, and that a lenient and generous approach would not have made any difference. However, a MOU official indicated that the ROK side should have been better prepared for the talks.

VERSHBOW